

**METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR EVALUATING
NEAR-TERM SUICIDAL RISK USING VOCAL PARAMETERS**

claims based 9/60/224,950 8/22/00

Background – Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to psychiatry and psychology and specifically to detection and evaluation of individuals having near-term suicidal risk, to facilitate treatment of such individuals and to prevent suicide.

Background – Description of the Prior Art

Current techniques for assessing suicidality in patients include clinical interviews, history-taking, assessment of current stressors and family evaluations. Structured questionnaires, such as Beck Inventories, are used as well as nonstructured projective psychological tests.

Paradoxically, optimal assessment of risk calls for extremely time-consuming integration of relevant information from numerous sources by experienced clinicians and/or crisis teams in situations usually requiring immediate judgments so that patient protection and support can be provided. While brief screening methods and scales are available, they rely heavily on known demographic, historic and diagnostic risk factors derived from epidemiological studies which may have limited specificity and utility in prediction of near-term suicidal risk.

Authorities on the front-line, namely clinical family practitioners, police, nurses, crisis/hot-line volunteers and first year residents in non-teaching hospitals or outside teaching hospital settings, are repeatedly called on to make rapid judgments involving responsibility for identifying persons at risk for suicide. This is despite their limited access to the most relevant information and being without sufficient knowledge, training or access to more experienced clinicians. There are times when an individual, such as a police officer, has little else but the heard voice of the patient to tell him or her what action the speaker patient intends.